

**Jen Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality in Victorian Fiction*** (London: Palgrave, 2016)

*God is Back!* Or, at least, so proclaimed John Micklethwaite and Adrian Wooldridge in their 2009 examination of the global revival of faith in the twenty-first century. The title suggested that God had been absent for a while, and was now making a welcome or unwelcome return, and was a riposte to both the famous pronouncement of Nietzsche's madman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) — 'God is dead!' — and the infamous *Time Magazine* front cover of 8 April 1966, which pointedly asked 'is God dead?' (the implicit answer being: 'yes, of course'). Pinpointing the time of his death was difficult, but Thomas Hardy had helped matters considerably with his poem 'God's Funeral' (1908-10), which provided a suitably gloomy title for A. N. Wilson's interesting examination of the slow demise of God through the Victorian period, as he succumbed to death by a thousand cuts (the knives wielded by the likes of Charles Lyell, A. G. Swinburne, George Eliot, Charles Darwin, Matthew Arnold, and so on).<sup>1</sup> Yes, despite being, in popular culture, associated with excessive and rigorous piety, repressive attitudes to sexuality, gender, race and everything else, those holy hypocrites, the Victorians, of all people, had actually also been the ones to finally put the knife in. Or so we all thought ...

In recent years/decades, things have, however, changed in Victorian studies. In particular, there have been enormous shifts in our understanding of the religious history of the period. Recent scholarship has challenged and transformed conventional thinking about the Victorian period as one characterised by a fairly monolithic version of what is called the 'crisis of faith', a crisis traditionally characterised as a struggle between 'Genesis and geology', or 'Jesus and Darwin', or more nebulously, 'religion and science', with Andrew Dickson White's *A History Of The Warfare Of Science With Theology In Christendom* (1896) apparently setting the terms for understanding the concluding battles to be fought in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This battle for hearts and minds supposedly contributed to the increasing secularisation of the Anglo-American world, and led, in part, to a falling away of support for traditional religious authorities, and the rise of agnosticism and atheism. Much work on the Victorians in the twentieth century was carried out when the 'secularisation thesis' still reigned supreme in the social sciences, and the implications of this thesis were rather too

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<sup>1</sup> A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilisation* (London: John Murray, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See especially Giles St Aubyn, *Souls in Torment: Victorian Faith in Crisis* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 2011); and Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004).

easily accepted in studies of the literature of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Such work tended to focus attention on ‘honest doubt’ rather than sincere faith, agnosticism rather than reflective belief, and outright atheism rather than religious fundamentalism, and frankly didn’t pay enough attention to religious continuities, or to personal and denominational adaptation to contemporary ideas rather than abandonment of faith.

The secularisation thesis has been under sustained assault for a while now, not least because most of the predictions about the ultimate disappearance of religion itself now look like they were either wildly optimistic, or pessimistic, depending on your particular convictions. The sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke have suggested that it is time to give it a decent burial: ‘After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophesies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper “requiescat in pace”.’<sup>4</sup> The misrepresentations of the Victorian period are being brilliantly addressed by the work of scholars like James C. Livingston, Timothy Larsen, Boyd Hilton, Melissa Schramm, and Giles St Aubyn, who are slowly transforming our understanding of the period, and drawing attention to neglected areas of religious innovation, transformation, and indeed, even renewed traditionalism. Larsen, for example, suggests that, far from religious conviction and belief being found intellectually untenable in the light of scientific discovery, in fact, as far as we can tell, far more sceptics became believers than believers sceptics in the late nineteenth century. God’s death was, it turns out, greatly exaggerated, not only because its chroniclers failed to predict the postmodern fundamentalists of the twenty-first century, but because they paid too much attention to an unrepresentative coterie in the nineteenth century, and not enough to those who resisted the attacks on religious traditions, or who found new and interesting ways of remaining religious during the crisis of faith, which may better be termed a crisis of meaning.

Literary scholars are fast catching up with the historians. Surprisingly enough, gothic studies has been rather behind the curve here — surprising because very many texts now gathered under the very expansive term ‘the gothic’ concern direct or indirect manifestations of the supernatural and the paranormal. In other words, the gothic actually addresses ideas about the nature of ultimate reality on a regular basis, and therefore is well placed to offer insights into the ways in which questions of meaning and faith were being debated. It may be

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<sup>3</sup> For a good example of the way assumptions about secularisation crept into even incisive work on Victorian literature, see Anthony Kenny, *God and Two Poets* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 79.

that the powerful grip of psychoanalysis on gothic studies discouraged scholars and critics from taking religious language seriously as anything other than evidence about the neurosis of characters within the text — after all, Freud himself had explained religion as a vast repression mechanism generated by an Oedipal crisis at the very dawn of human history. As the psychoanalytic paradigm has come under attack, gothicists have been looking anew at whether the genre is a contribution to a secularising process within culture more generally, or a reaction against it. The compelling work of scholars like Alison Milbank and Diane Long Hoeveler has been crucial to persuading gothic specialists to look at religion again when considering the genre.

However, while there has indeed been a turn ‘back’ to religion in many areas of gothic studies, this had, until now, not really touched the ghost story or supernatural tale (although it would seem self-evident that stories with ghosts and supernatural events in them are commentaries on religious matters). The dominant reading of ghost stories has, in fact, been materialist — as evident in both Simon Hay’s *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (2012), and Andrew Smith’s *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (2012). While both of these recent studies are superb treatments of the economic and material contexts necessary for a full understanding of the prominence of the ghost story in Victorian Britain, they tend to avoid engaging with the changing religious landscape or theology in a direct way. Earlier work on ghost stories — such as Jack Sullivan’s very influential *Elegant Nightmares* (1978) — adopted a psychoanalytical approach that translated theology into psychology in a very direct way. However, thinking theologically about ghosts and ghost stories makes sense. After all, the ghost does not speak only of the forces or discourses of materialist modernity that were actually decentring Victorians from confident at-homeness-in-the-universe, but usually speaks another, and rather more disconcerting language entirely. If nineteenth-century geology, physics, and biology were in the business of dislodging homo-centrism, the ghost story dislodges, or at least undermines, the very instrument through which some of these new versions of science were articulated — the language of empirical reasoning. After all, ghosts could not exist, according to both Protestant theology and dogmatic naturalism, and if they (actually) did, then even more adjusting had to be done.

Two recent and very substantial studies of the Victorian ghost story appeared in 2016, both arguing that these tales should be read as interventions into the very complex faith crises of the period. In a convincing analysis, Zoe Lehmann Imfeld’s *The Victorian Ghost Story and Theology: From Le Fanu to James* contends that these stories need to be resituated in what

she believes to be their true theological context. Imfeld proposes that the protagonists of ghost stories take a theological 'journey' over the course of the text, from what the sociologist Charles Taylor calls the 'bounded' or 'buffered' secular self of a post-Enlightened world, to a much more complicated and porous self in which, as she argues, 'man is *both* immanent and transcendent'.<sup>5</sup> More controversial is her proposition that it is not just the protagonists of the stories who are taken along this theological journey, but also the reader, who inhabits the same secular world as the sceptical characters. Therefore, these supernatural tales could be considered (in a nuanced and qualified way) as having religious designs on the readers. Indeed, Imfeld not only suggests that theology is central to an understanding of the ghost story and the supernatural tale more generally, but that it is virtually impossible to understand these stories outside the theological context, and that this context includes the reader's participation in a spiritual 'journey' (and metaphors of travel are used throughout the book) leading to a post-secular sensibility.

Imfeld is not the only contemporary scholar sensitive to the complicated religious history to which Victorian ghost stories speak. Jen Cadwallader's lively, accessible, and very insightful *Spirits and Spirituality in Victorian Fiction* brilliantly problematises readings of ghost stories as articulations of an agnostic sensibility and 'contends that the ghost story highlights the way faith adapted to and evolved in the scientific climate of the nineteenth century' (p. 6). Cadwallader carefully chooses major writers of ghost stories, and major crises of meaning that these authors addressed in their work. A powerful chapter on Sheridan Le Fanu traces the transformation of the ghost in his work, from the early quasi-folk tales focused around Father Purcell, where the ghost is rendered a function of substance abuse, alcohol consumption, and a dissipated life, to the author's undermining of the mid-century physiological and psychological dismissal of the ghost by the scientific and medical establishments, in his collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1871). Le Fanu is, Cadwallader demonstrates, highly sceptical of the many scientific claims to have 'solved' the continued sightings of ghosts and phantoms in a post-Enlightenment era. Doctors increasingly explained away the ghost as proof of the unbalanced mind and/or body of the ghost-seer, and Cadwallader marshals a large body of textual and contextual evidence to demonstrate that Le Fanu skewers patronising professionals in the figure of Dr Martin Hesselius, despite the latter's pretensions to 'metaphysical' as well as physical expertise.

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<sup>5</sup> Zoë Lehmann Imfeld, *The Victorian Ghost Story and Theology: From Le Fanu to James* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 25.

Le Fanu's withering scepticism about the efficacy of medical treatment can be found almost everywhere in his work, and Cadwallader's close reading of the ghost stories as critiques of those of Le Fanu's contemporaries who 'blindly adhere to the scientific system' (p. 48) is very persuasive. For Cadwallader, the haunted Rev. Jennings in 'Green Tea', who insists that the monkey that haunts him is a physical affliction, is the fictional equivalent of physiologists like John Ferriar, Charles Ollier and John Alderson who all considered ghosts to be medical rather than metaphysical problems. I was not so convinced, though, by the argument that he also refuses to place any faith in religion, an argument Cadwallader expands from Jack Sullivan's discernment of an almost nihilistic cosmology at the heart of texts like 'Green Tea', 'Mr Justice Harbottle', and 'The Familiar'. Richard Haslam has recently contended that Calvinism rather than nihilism might offer a better insight into such puzzling texts,<sup>6</sup> and given the renewal and revival of traditions of Protestantism heavily inflected by Calvinist theology in the nineteenth century, future scholars may need to look to the controversies in the Victorian Church of Ireland for explanations of Le Fanu's apparent spiritual pessimism.

In a rewarding chapter examining both Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), Cadwallader argues that Dickens responds to the same kinds of cultural pressures to medicalise or psychologise the ghost as Le Fanu. Because Dickens connected the ghost to time and memory, Cadwallader argues that he proposes what she calls a "blended" understanding of spiritual experiences' (p. 51), bringing the ghost-seer to a deeper understanding of reality and the self. The attention she gives to the neglected *Haunted Man* is particularly welcome, and the chapter is punctuated by sparkling insights into the Victorian Christmas as a 'festival time', a time-out-of-ordinary-time, a more elastic temporality in which past, present, and future entered into a kind of existential dialogue, for which conversation a ghost — a fragment of the past in the present, representing a possible future state — was a perfect interlocutor (which goes some way to explain the perennial association between ghost stories and the Christmas season).

Another chapter examines the reasons behind the extraordinary number of women writers who produced splendid examples of the ghost story in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it might be true to say that women actually dominated the field in the nineteenth century, as any examination of Victorian periodicals such as the *All the Year Round* and *Household*

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Haslam, 'Le Fanu's "Green Tea" and Irish Victorian Calvinism', *Inspiring a Mysterious Terror': 200 Years of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, ed. by Jarlath Killeen and Valeria Cavalli (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 93-116.

*Words* will attest. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Mrs Henry Wood, Charlotte Riddell, Elizabeth Gaskell, Amelia Edwards, Rhoda Broughton, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, Dinah Mulock, Louisa Molesworth, Rosa Mulholland, Edith Nesbit, Louisa Baldwin, and Violet Hunt are only the most prominent names in a large group of writers, most of whom are now almost completely forgotten and unread. For Cadwallader, many of these women directly tackled the medical establishment's view that ghost seeing (something that was often particularly associated with women, who made up the majority of mediums in the period) was a function of pathology, which could, in turn, justify incarceration. Cadwallader argues that, by turning to ghost stories, women writers were expressing a 'shared concern over the way women were "diagnosed" [as hysterics in need of medical treatment] in various branches of the sciences' (p. 86). Tackling Margaret Oliphant, a conservative, and Rhoda Broughton, a 'progressive', Cadwallader persuasively demonstrates that, from their very different political positions, both women writers used their work to respond to, and to try to undermine, these supposedly authoritative discourses that ultimately worked to marginalise women who simply had different ideas about spirituality, religion, the afterlife, and ghosts.

In a fascinating, *tour-de-force* final chapter, focusing on the connections between ghost stories, spirit photography, and the material culture of Victorian funerals, Cadwallader demonstrates that all three are deeply invested in certain ideas about what has in other places been termed 'speculative theology', or the future life — what happens to us after we die. The camera, which snapped the corpse before burial for future contemplation by loved ones (and indeed by strangers who bought photographs of dead children they had never even met), and also apparently captured the spirits of the dead hovering near their grieving relatives, became a crucial medium for both ghost believers and ghost deniers. For those like Arthur Conan Doyle, believers in spirit photography, cutting-edge modern technology provided ostensibly empirical proof of the post-mortem survival of the individual spirit; for the sceptics, the camera could be used to refute spook enthusiasts by demonstrating how easily such credulous die-hards could be taken in by frauds, pranksters, and collections of dust on a lens.

Cadwallader performs sensitive and careful close readings of these stories, as well as providing a powerful sense of the complexity of the ghost story's position in Victorian culture. I recommend *Spirits and the Spiritual in Victorian Fiction* very strongly.

Jarlath Killeen

**Ruth Franklin, *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (New York: Liveright, 2016)**

Despite enjoying critical success in the 1950s and '60s, Shirley Jackson's works lay nearly forgotten for several decades after her sudden death in 1965. Her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, published some of her works posthumously in 1966 and 1968, but his untimely death in 1970 ended his endeavours to guarantee her literary legacy. The Hyman family carefully packed the couple's papers carefully away in boxes, which were later donated to the Library of Congress. For the next three decades, Jackson's most popular story, 'The Lottery' (1948), remained her strongest link to a reading public. Only two of her later novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), stayed consistently on bookstore shelves. For those who became interested in Jackson's writing, the only places to go were libraries, used bookstores, and the archives of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress.

In contrast to that relative neglect, the 2000s saw her works finally recognised as vital to modern gothic canon, especially by scholars of female gothic and suburban gothic. Since the publication of Bernice M. Murphy's collection, *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy* (2005), something of a resurgence in scholarly interest has been taking place. Many of the essays contain research conducted in the Jackson archive at the Library of Congress. Even more beneficially, previously unpublished material has been released from the archive, in the form of a new collection of short stories and essays, *Let Me Tell You* (2015). Coinciding with these, new scholarly material has also begun to emerge, such as Melanie R. Anderson and Lisa Kröger's *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences* (2016).

Concurrent with the appearance of research, fiction writers who claim the gothic as either their favoured genre or as an inspiring influence, such as Neil Gaiman, Joyce Carol Oates, and Stephen King, have sung Jackson's praises in various print and social media. Oates's commentary on Jackson's works is both silently and outspokenly supportive of the value of Jackson's writing: Oates edited the Library of Congress publication *Shirley Jackson: Novels and Stories* (2010), and in 2016, wrote an article entitled 'Shirley Jackson in Love and Death' for the *New York Review of Books*, which reviewed Franklin's biography of Jackson, while discussing Jackson's life and literary works.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gaiman has mentioned Jackson's importance on several occasions, including in his list of female writers who

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<sup>1</sup> See Joyce Carol Oates, 'Shirley Jackson in Love and Death', *The New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2016 <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/10/27/shirley-jackson-in-love-death/>> [accessed 27 September 2017].

influenced his writing,<sup>2</sup> in his blog as a recommended reading,<sup>3</sup> upon his nomination for the 2011 Shirley Jackson Awards (for best anthology and best short story; he won for best short story),<sup>4</sup> and in newspaper articles.<sup>5</sup> Stephen King is much more specific in his praise of Jackson's writing, significantly including her works in his book on horror fiction, *Danse Macabre* (1981), where he states that *The Haunting of Hill House*'s opening lines are 'the sort of quiet epiphany every writer hopes for: words that somehow transcend the sum of the parts'.<sup>6</sup> The value of these authors' praise of Jackson's works first and foremost lies in its power to capture the imagination a new generation of readers who will enjoy her books. Their praise also helps canonise her works as major contributions to classic twentieth-century American fiction.

Yet none of these recent publications have uncovered as much rich information nor have as much potential to inspire new scholarship as Ruth Franklin's award-winning *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, which has been acclaimed by numerous critics, fiction writers, and scholars as restoring/repositioning Jackson's literary legacy. The book has won several awards thus far, including the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography (2016), the Edgar Award for Critical/Biographical (2017), and the Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in Nonfiction (2017). It has been on major lists of recommended novels, such as that of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.<sup>7</sup> Most major news outlets have posted favourable reviews, but each seems to focus on a different aspect of the

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<sup>2</sup> The list was a response on Twitter to literary journalist Gay Talese's inability to mention any women writers who had inspired him. Jackson was among the women in Neil Gaiman's list of inspirations. Interestingly, the list went viral and now has a permanent home on the New York Public Library website. See Lauren Weiss, *Neil Gaiman on Women Writers Who Inspired Him* <<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/04/06/neil-gaiman-women-writers>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>3</sup> The list of recommended reads moved to his publisher's website, but two of Jackson's books remain on the list: 'The Lottery' and *The Haunting of Hill House*. See 'Book Recommendations from Neil Gaiman', *All Hallow's Read* <<http://www.allhallowsread.com/2012/10/02/from-neil-gaiman/>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>4</sup> The blog entry not only explains how the awards honour Jackson's literary legacy (they're awarded to authors who have written a significant work in suspense, dark fantasy, and horror fiction), but also encourages readers to pick up her short stories, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. See Gaiman, 'From the Desk of Mr Amanda F Palmer' <<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2011/07/from-desk-of-mr-amanda-f-palmer.html>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

<sup>5</sup> See for example Gaiman quoted David Barnett, 'The Haunting of Shirley Jackson: Was the Gothic Author's Life Really as Bleak as her Fiction?', *The Independent*, 1 August 2015 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-haunting-of-shirley-jackson-was-the-gothic-authors-life-really-as-bleak-as-her-fiction-10428397.html>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

<sup>6</sup> See Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Gallery Books, 2010), p. 310. The quotation in full reads, 'I think there are few if any descriptive passages in the English language that are any finer than this; it is the sort of quiet epiphany every writer hopes for: words that somehow transcend the sum of the parts'. King also compares *Hill House* favourably to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* in the same passage, naming these books as significant psychological suspense novels which imply ghosts but have none. King has also included *Hill House* in his Stephen King Horror Library publication series (2003), penning the introduction himself.

<sup>7</sup> For a more complete list of awards and book list mentions, see Ruth Franklin's website <<http://ruthfranklin.net/author/books/shirley-jackson/>> [accessed 4 October 2017].

biography, emphasising its value as a multifaceted work. For example, the *Guardian* byline reads, ‘a sympathetic biography argues for a feminist reappraisal of a tortured genius of American gothic’, and considers Jackson’s value as a gothic author whose fiction focused on the experiences of women.<sup>8</sup> Elaine Showalter’s review in the *Washington Post* spotlights Jackson’s use of writing as an expression of her inner world, her interest in the innate evil of human beings, and her desire for freedom.<sup>9</sup> These and many others are supremely complimentary; Showalter even states that Franklin has reawakened interest in Jackson’s ‘genius’.<sup>10</sup>

Although a biography of Jackson was already extant, namely Judy Oppenheimer’s *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson* (1988), it lacked depth, and de-emphasised Jackson’s impressive ability. Instead, it primarily discussed her balancing of career and family. Citations are comparatively few, and Oppenheimer’s opinions are inserted liberally throughout in ornate prose, lending a sensational feel to the text. Passages regarding Jackson’s relationship with her husband are particularly purple and eyebrow-raising: ‘Stanley’s lively interest in good-looking women was certainly real enough. Yet the image of the mad Dionysian artist, wild and lusty, unbound by the rules, also happened to be one he was particularly fond of assuming.’<sup>11</sup> While some extant letters from the archive, such as those between Stanley and his friend Walter Bernstein, seem to imply extra-marital dalliances as both fact and fantasy, it hardly seems historically accurate to describe them as a penchant for bacchanal.

It therefore would seem that Oppenheimer did not thoroughly examine or perhaps did not have access to a great deal of extant archival material related to Jackson’s authorial life. There is little in that biography to indicate that Jackson was a rising star in the American

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Churchwell, ‘*Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* by Ruth Franklin Review — Beyond Spooky’, *Guardian*, 10 February 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/10/shirley-jackson-ruth-franklin-review-a-rather-haunted-life>> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Showalter, ‘Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life’, *Washington Post*, 22 September 2016 <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-jackson-a-rather-haunted-life/2016/09/15/4293b85e-5f2b-11e6-af8e-54aa2e849447\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a61754589491](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-jackson-a-rather-haunted-life/2016/09/15/4293b85e-5f2b-11e6-af8e-54aa2e849447_story.html?utm_term=.a61754589491)> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>10</sup> However, not all the reviews are complimentary. Charles McGrath of the *New York Times* has few kind words about Jackson’s work. He is more interested in Franklin’s efforts to show Jackson as a writer caught between devotion to her craft and taking care of her family in the mid-twentieth century. See Charles McGrath, ‘The Case for Shirley Jackson’, *New York Times*, 30 September 2016 <[https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/books/review/shirley-jackson-ruth-franklin.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/books/review/shirley-jackson-ruth-franklin.html?_r=0)> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>11</sup> See Judy Oppenheimer, *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988), p. 107.

literary world of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> This is because, unlike Franklin, Oppenheimer relied mainly on interviews, publisher's notes, and newspaper articles (which tend towards the sensational). These she intermixed with interpolated correspondence from the archives and Jackson's fiction. More importantly, Oppenheimer's book is dismissive of Jackson's connections to other authors. For example, Oppenheimer is indifferent to the idea that Jackson could have had an intellectual relationship with Ralph Ellison, stating instead that Jackson befriended Mrs Ellison, and that Stanley Hyman, Jackson's husband, influenced Ralph. This codifying of their behaviour in a stereotypical mid-twentieth-century heteronormative fashion bolstered Oppenheimer's claim that Stanley was the driving force of Jackson's authorial vision.<sup>13</sup> Yet archival matter from both the Ellison Papers and the Stanley Edgar Hyman Papers at the Library of Congress would indicate that Oppenheimer's opinion is not based in fact. Franklin makes clear in her biography that both Jackson and her husband were influential intellectual forces for Ellison.<sup>14</sup> Even more unfortunately, the second half of Oppenheimer's book drifts away from Jackson's stories almost entirely, focusing primarily on family matters and speculation on her mental health at a time when Jackson was increasingly focused on her writing. At the same time, it ignores almost all of the material in the archive relating to issues with her publisher and her agent, as well as an increasing amount of correspondence with other famous contemporary authors towards the end of her life.

In contrast, Franklin provides us with a biography that not only goes beyond the Oppenheimer's insufficient efforts; it also details Jackson's personal and literary lives with clear prose and little speculation. Even when Franklin integrates literary analyses of Jackson's novels and short stories, she never loses sight of the important separation between fictional characters and their author. That is to say, Oppenheimer often gives in to the fantasy that Jackson's narrators are in some sense the author herself, but Franklin makes a clear separation between the two. In parallel examinations of *The Bird's Nest* (1954), a deeply psychological novel about a young women's struggle with multiple personality disorder, the two come to totally opposite conclusions. Oppenheimer interpreted the book as a reflection of Jackson's personal dissonance: 'The subject of multiple personality disorder attracted her in a

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<sup>12</sup> As Franklin helpfully points out, Jackson's name is mentioned alongside Truman Capote, Eudora Welty, and others as one of a 'group of emerging writers' in the early 1950s. See Ruth Franklin, *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (New York: Liveright, 2016), p. 277.

<sup>13</sup> See Oppenheimer, pp. 103-04.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Ellison asked for her advice on *Invisible Man* (1952) from both Stanley and Shirley, but it was Shirley's page proofs from *Hangsaman* (1951) that he used to help with his editing. See Franklin, pp. 276-77.

very personal way — Shirley knew that she too, in a sense, had several different personalities, all jostling against each other in uneasy truce.<sup>15</sup> She merely examines the characters/personalities in light of Jackson's own background. In contrast, Franklin treads very carefully, knowing that Jackson's interest in personality disorders went back to her college days, when she took a course on abnormal psychology, or perhaps even before.<sup>16</sup> Franklin admits that writing *The Bird's Nest* caused Jackson deep emotional distress, enough to make her physically ill.<sup>17</sup> She also mentions how the themes of the novel — feeling motherless, implied physical abuse by a partner or carer, yearning for affection — might have been unresolved sources of stress and angst for Jackson. Nevertheless, as Franklin helpfully points out, these themes reappear many times in Jackson's work: in *Hangsaman* (1951), in *The Haunting of Hill House*, and in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, as well as in her short fiction. Franklin states that the more disturbing content of these novels, such as matricide and molestation, are not meant to be read as literal desires or events in Jackson's life.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Franklin's *Shirley Jackson* shows the biographer's devotion to fastidious and sensible analysis of fictional works, considering the events of the author's life and the emotions that surrounded them.

In addition to her observations on Jackson's interest in the psychological both in real life and for her fiction, Franklin comments at length on Jackson's use of the house as a focal point of mental disease.<sup>19</sup> Further, she remarks that the houses in all of Jackson's major works, especially her final three novels, are significant: '[each] has its own distinct personality and indeed functions as a kind of character in the book'.<sup>20</sup> In her discussion of the house in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Franklin states it is 'physically at a remove from the village beneath it, surrounded by a barrier'.<sup>21</sup> Removing the characters from the town shows their physical isolation as well as the mental obstacles that prevent them from participating in village life. Jackson carefully planned such physical spaces in her novels (she even drew sketches, which are reprinted in *Shirley Jackson*) to reflect the themes as well as

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<sup>15</sup> Oppenheimer, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> Although it appears Jackson did not save all her college notebooks, she seems to have kept quite a lot of information from a course she took at Syracuse on abnormal psychology. These are stored in the Library of Congress archive.

<sup>17</sup> Franklin, p. 348.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin, p. 350.

<sup>19</sup> This should be of interest to gothic scholarship, as the house is a major motif in gothic fiction. For examples of commentary on the house in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, see Franklin, pp. 444-46, 449-50; for *The Haunting of Hill House*, see pp. 409-19.

<sup>20</sup> Franklin, p. 409.

<sup>21</sup> Franklin, p. 444.

the mental state of the characters. Franklin's insights are therefore important to the inclusion of Jackson's house-centred stories in the domestic-gothic sub-genre.

What is more, although the houses in works like *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* or *The Haunting of Hill House* have been treated as gothic in previous scholarship, Franklin implies that we might also consider Jackson's semi-autobiographical works, *Life Among the Savages* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1957), as possessing similar themes and imagery. Franklin reminds us that the title *Raising Demons* was not the book's sole allusion to the occult: 'the book again included a nod to her studies in witchcraft, with an epigraph describing the conjuration of demons taken from the Grimoire of Honorius, a compendium of magical knowledge from around 1800'.<sup>22</sup> The house, as a locus of familial emotion, is also a place of magic and horror, even when Jackson is discussing the antics of her children.

Equally significant to these valuable textual and biographical analyses, *Shirley Jackson* contains the information that Oppenheimer overlooked, or perhaps could not make sense of — that is, the jumble of notes, letters, and discarded drafts belonging to Jackson and her husband, currently housed in the US Library of Congress archives. This archive is especially confusing, with many unlabelled and misfiled materials, so Franklin's creation of a clear and concise timeline of Jackson's personal and literary life should be considered a laudable achievement. As a fellow scholar who has conducted research in these archives over the past decade, I cannot help but stand in awe of how Franklin has made sense of Jackson's earlier diaries from her teenage and college years, as well as her ability to read between the lines about Jackson's difficult relationship with her family, and later, her husband. As well as the archives at the Library of Congress, Franklin has also drawn extensively on other archives and private collections related to Jackson's life and works. Free of numbered footnotes that might break up the text for many readers, but nevertheless containing copious annotations, *Shirley Jackson* uses the convention of indexing citations at the back of the book. At the same time, the book generously contains a list of the relevant archives and persons that provided the source material for the book, so a scholarly reader would know where to conduct further research.

Unravelling the mystery of the archives has enabled Franklin to provide her readers with minute details regarding the literary value of Jackson's marriage to her professor/writer husband, the connections they both had to the East Coast and Midwestern literati (friends included the Ellisons, the Malamuds, and the Burkes), her love of music (especially folk

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<sup>22</sup> Franklin, p. 364.

songs and jazz), and her increasing popularity as a speaker and teacher at literary retreats and seminars in the last decade of her life (she became a regular at the Middlebury Bread Loaf writers' conferences, where she worked with the likes of Robert Frost and Julia Child). *Shirley Jackson* carefully illuminates the relationship that Jackson had with her editors, publishers, and agents, extrapolating the story from diary entries and letters, and not just from interviews. Franklin also adds details contextualising these relationships, explaining that Jackson eventually shared an editor with authors like John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, Marianne Moore, and Graham Greene.<sup>23</sup> While these details are fascinating, perhaps the only drawback to *Shirley Jackson* is this copious detail, which some readers may find superfluous, especially in the case of information on Jackson's husband.

While she was alive, Jackson's writing spanned a broad range of genres, from humorous 'housewife' tales to serious psychological horror. But contemporary critics, who preferred women writers to produce either serious fiction or light-hearted, family-centred stories, had an immense amount of trouble labelling her work.<sup>24</sup> In several interviews, she became annoyed with their pigeonholing and ironically played up her interest in the occult. This led the news media to link her with images of witches, tarot readings, and ghosts.<sup>25</sup> Yet Franklin does not shy away from considering Jackson as a horror author, or as an author with an interest in the occult, the supernatural, and the gothic. She also does not try to overlook Jackson's semi-autobiographical family stories. Instead, *Shirley Jackson* provides a balanced examination of both Jackson's uncanny fiction and her family-friendly stories, considering the advantages of the duality in juxtaposition. Franklin concludes that Jackson was able to manage both genres because they are two sides of the same coin. She also uses this conclusion to explain why the duality of Jackson's works has led to them being misread and

<sup>23</sup> The editor, Pascal (Pat) Covici, became an important influence on her writing and believed in her talent as an author. She dedicated *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* to him. See Franklin, p. 187. See also pp. 420-424.

<sup>24</sup> In letters to her mother and father, Jackson defended herself against the idea that negative reviews of her serious fiction might damage her public image as a wife and mother and prevent her success as a writer of domestic stories (her mother encouraged her to concentrate on the 'family stories'). But from a modern perspective, writing in both genres lends great significance to Jackson's work. A. M. Holmes has considered this problem at length in her introduction to *The Lottery* and elsewhere. See A. M. Holmes, *The Lottery and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), p. xi-xii. See also Holmes's podcast interview with *The New Yorker*, 'A. M. Holmes Reads Shirley Jackson' <<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/a-m-holmes-reads-shirley-jackson>> [accessed 18 October 2017].

<sup>25</sup> One strong example may be found in her *New York Times* obituary, in which the editors assign her to both genres of the 'domestic' and the 'macabre'. Further, they problematically assert her eccentricities and wifeliness over and above her authorial abilities: 'Because Miss Jackson wrote so frequently about ghosts and witches and magic, it was said that she used a broomstick for a pen. But the fact was that she used a typewriter — and then only after she had completed her household chores.' See 'Shirley Jackson, Author of Horror Classic, Dies', *New York Times*, 10 August 1965 <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1965/08/10/101560334.html?pageNumber=29>> [accessed 18 October 2017].

miscategorised not only during her life, but also after her death; even Jackson's obituaries marked her as 'witchy', despite the fact that even her so-called horror classic, *The Haunting of Hill House*, arguably has no ghosts and no monster, only psychological terror. Franklin insists we take Jackson's oeuvre seriously for what it is, not for how the press labelled it and its author.

Overall, Franklin has written a biography with all the detail and finesse that a writer of Shirley Jackson's calibre deserves. It stresses that Jackson wrote valuable and complex fictions and that as an author she lived a rich, imaginative, and productive life. This biography has reawakened a reading public's interest in the full range of Jackson's oeuvre, from her gothic tales to her darkly humorous family sketches. *Shirley Jackson* will hopefully serve as a point of reference for existing scholars interested in Jackson, as well as a point of departure for new scholars to discover the multifaceted nature of Jackson's life, works, and connections to the twentieth-century literary world.

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